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Serial No.: 09/676,319

Amendment to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:

receiving registration information from associated with a user;

verifying at least some of the registration information, wherein the registration information includes information indicative of an identity of the user, and further includes a registration status of the user indicating whether the user is currently in compliance with one or more requirements of a professional registration authority;

issuing a digital credential to the user based upon a result from the verification; and

communicating at least some of the registration information to a central authentication service.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 further including periodically communicating the registration status of the user to the central authentication service.

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3. (original) The method of claim 1 further including uploading client software to the user's computer, wherein the client software forces real-time authentication of the digital credential using the central authentication service.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 further including generating a confirmation level for the digital certificate credential based on the verification of the registration information, wherein the confirmation level is a first confirmation level if the user is currently in compliance with at least a first requirement of the one or more requirements, and wherein the confirmation level is a second different confirmation level if the user is currently in compliance with at least a second different requirement of the one or more requirements.

5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein verifying the registration information includes verifying a currently valid medical license number.

6. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:  
receiving a digital credential from a relying party,  
wherein the digital credential is associated with a user

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registered with a registration authority for licensed professionals;

verifying an identity of the user based on the digital credential;

verifying a registration status of the user with the registration authority, the registration status of the user indicative of whether the user is authorized to perform one or more restricted activities; and

authenticating the digital credential based on the verifications.

7. (original) The method of claim 6, wherein verifying the registration status of the user includes accessing a local copy of registration information maintained by the registration authority.

8. (original) The method of claim 6, wherein verifying the registration status of the user includes querying the registration authority.

9. (original) The method of claim 6, wherein verifying the registration status includes verifying that a medical license for the user remains valid.

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10. (original) The method of claim 6, wherein verifying the identity of the user includes using a public key for the registration authority to verify a digital signature of the digital credential.

11. (original) The method of claim 6 further including reporting a result of the verification to the relying party.

12. (original) The method of claim 6 further including storing a result of the verification in an activity log.

13. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:  
initiating a challenge-response sequence from a client computer when a user uses a digital credential, the digital credential including information indicative of an identity of the user, the digital credential further indicative of user compliance with one or more requirements of a registration authority for licensed professionals;

receiving a challenge from a remote server; and  
responding to the challenge using the digital credential.

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14. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 13 further comprising accessing a-the registration authority to receive the digital credential, and wherein user compliance with one or more requirements of a registration authority comprises user compliance with one or more licensing requirements of the registration authority.

15. (original) The method of claim 13 further comprising forwarding the digital credential to a central authentication service in response to the challenge received from the remote server.

16. (Currently Amended) A computing system comprising:  
a web browser configured to access a remote server; and  
a plug-in software module executed by the web browser to cause the server to perform initiate a challenge-response sequence when a user uses a digital credential including information indicative of a status of the user indicating that the user is authorized by a registration authority for licensed professionals to access restricted information on the remote server.

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17. (original) The computing system of claim 16, wherein the plug-in comprises a Java applet.

18. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:  
forming a contract with a relying party to centrally authenticate digital credentials issued by a registration authority for licensed professionals, the digital credentials including information indicative of compliance with one or more requirements of the registration authority; and charging the relying party for the authentication.

19. (original) The method of claim 18, wherein charging the relying party includes charging the relying party a subscription fee.

20. (original) The method of claim 18, wherein charging the relying party includes charging the relying party a transaction fee per authentication.

21. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 18, further comprising authenticating a digital credential by:  
verifying an identity of a user based on the digital credential; and

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verifying a registration status of the user with the registration authority, wherein the registration status is indicative of whether the user is licensed by the registration authority.

22. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 18 further comprising requiring in the contract that the relying party digitally sign communications presented to a user transmitted by the relying party to a user associated with the a user-specific digital credential.

23. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:  
digitally signing an electronic input form, wherein at least some portions of the electronic input form are to be completed by licensed professional users, wherein licensed professional users have a valid license issued by a registration authority; and  
communicating the form to a user for completion.

24. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 23 further comprising:  
receiving the completed form and a digital credential associated with the user; and

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forwarding the digital credential and the signed input form to a central authentication service to authenticate that the user is a licensed professional user.

25. (Currently Amended) A system comprising:  
a database configured to store registration information received from a registration authority for licensed professionals, the registration information indicative of compliance with one or more requirements of the registration authority; and

an authentication server configured to verify a digital credential according to the registration information.

26. (original) The system of claim 25, wherein the authentication server is configured to receive the digital credential from a relying party.

27. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 25, wherein the authentication server is configured to:

verify an identity of a user based on the digital credential;  
verify a registration status of the user with the registration authority for licensed professionals, wherein the

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registration status of the user is indicative of compliance of  
at least a first requirement of the one or more requirements;  
and

authenticate the digital credential based on the  
verifications.

28. (Currently Amended) An article comprising a computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions stored thereon for causing a computer to:

receive a digital credential from a relying party, wherein the digital credential is associated with a user registered with a registration authority;

verify an identity of the user based on the digital credential;

verify a registration status of the user with the registration authority for licensed professionals, the  
registration status of the user indicative of whether the user  
is authorized to perform one or more restricted activities; and

authenticate the digital credential based on the verifications.

29. (original) The article of claim 28, wherein the instructions cause the computer to access a local copy of

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registration information maintained by the registration authority.

30. (original) The article of claim 28, wherein the instructions cause the computer to query the registration authority.

31. (original) The article of claim 28, wherein the instructions cause the computer to verify that a medical license for the user remains valid.

32. (original) The article of claim 28, wherein the instructions cause the computer to use a public key for the registration authority to verify a digital signature of the digital credential.

33. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:  
receiving a challenge signed by a digital credential from a relying party, wherein the digital credential is associated with a user registered with a registration authority for licensed professionals;

verifying an identity of the user based on the digital credential;

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verifying a registration status of the user with the registration authority, the registration status indicative of an authorization by a licensing board for the user to perform one or more restricted activities; and

authenticating the user for the relying party based on the verification.

34. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:  
issuing a digital credential to a user indicating that the user is a licensed professional; and  
verifying all uses of the digital credential at a central authentication service.

35. (original) The method of claim 34, further comprising recording uses of the digital credential at the central authentication service.

36. (original) The method of claim 35, further comprising receiving a request from a relying party for verification of the digital credential, and communicating the result of the verification to the relying party.

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37. (original) The method of claim 36, wherein the relying party is one of a plurality of relying parties.

38. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:  
receiving information from a registration authority for  
licensed professionals; and  
creating a digital credential for a user based on the information received from a registration authority, wherein the information includes both information of an identity of the user and information indicative of compliance by the user with one or more regulations substantially static and substantially dynamic information.

39. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 38, wherein the static information includes registration information, and the dynamic information indicative of user compliance with one or more requirements of a registration authority includes information indicative of a status of the user indicating good standing information with the registration authority.

40. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 38, further comprising updating the dynamic information indicative of user

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compliance with one or more requirements of a registration authority on a substantially regular basis.

41. (original) The method of claim 38, further comprising recording one or more biometric characteristics for the user.